

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Take precautions to prevent the spread of mosquitoes

A potential problem exists with mosquitoes during the recovery phase after Hurricane Katrina following flooding in the state. The Alabama Department of Public Health continues to advise caution to those who are entering flooded areas. Mosquitoes are one of the problems to be remembered, as they can carry serious diseases such as encephalitis (sleeping sickness) and West Nile virus. Mosquitoes breed in standing water. The following measures are advised to prevent the spread of mosquitoes: Empty all water from old tires, cans, jars, buckets, drums, plastic wading pools and other containers. When possible, clean clogged roof gutters and repair broken screens. Replenish pet watering dishes daily.

Residents of flooded areas should be particularly careful to reduce their exposure to mosquito bites. Mosquitoes are most active during the late evening, night and early morning. If possible, outside activities should be limited during these times.

If you must be outside, mosquito repellents should be used. DEET, Picaridin and oil of lemon eucalyptus are effective insect repellents. The percent of the product determines how long protection lasts. For example, 23.8 percent DEET provides an average of five hours of protection from mosquito bites, 20 percent DEET provides almost four hours of protection, 6.65 percent DEET provides almost two hours of protection, and 4.75 percent DEET provides roughly 90 minutes of protection. Reapplication needs to be done following these intervals or sooner if mosquitoes again start to bite.

Picaridin has the advantage of being odorless and it does not dissolve plastics the way DEET does.

Follow label instructions carefully when using any insect repellent. Repellents should not be used on infants less than 2 months old. The American Academy of Pediatrics has not yet issued specific recommendations concerning the use of picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus for children.

Loose-fitting long sleeves and long pants can afford added protection from

mosquito bites. People should also be aware that aromatic cosmetics and dark clothing may help attract unwanted insects.

Mosquito bites can be treated with topical agents such as calamine lotions. Cortisone creams and oral antihistamines are available as over-the-counter medications that can reduce itching. Bites to children should be watched for secondary infections that need to be treated by a physician.

The primary signs of mosquito-borne disease in people are a high fever and headaches severe enough to require medical attention. Other less common signs in addition to fever and headaches include confusion, neck pain and stiffness and seizures.